



# The Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project

## The SARS Amri to Kirbekan Survey. Excavations at the pyramid, Site 4-F-71

*Derek A. Welsby*

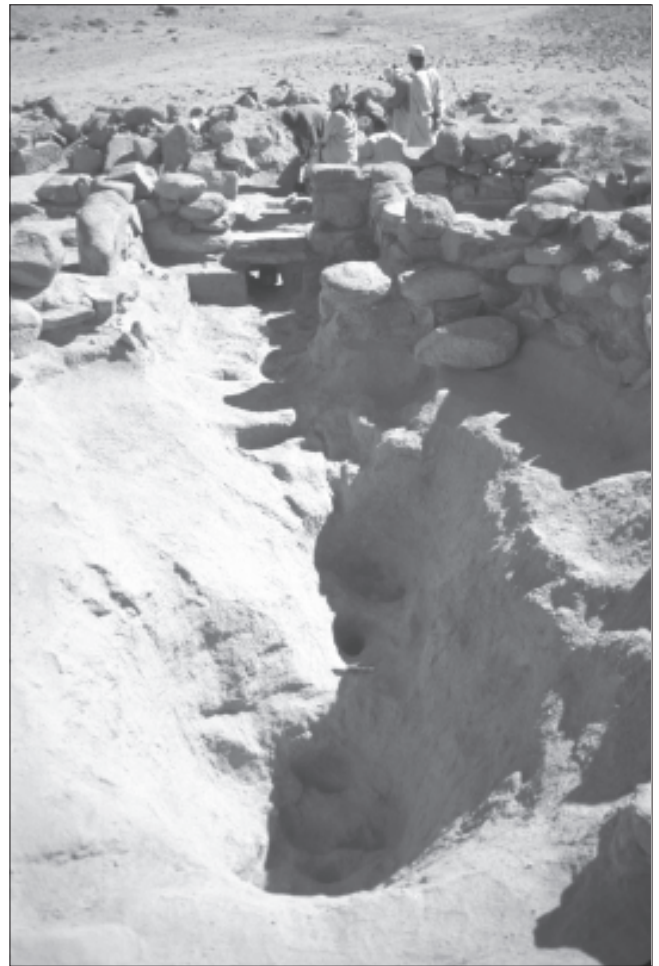
Site 4-F-71, lying between et-Tereif and Birti and a little to the south of the village of el-Kenisa, was first recorded in December 1999 by the Sudan Archaeological Research Society's team. At that time it appeared to be a substantial building with one large and one small room entered through a wide entrance to the west, the walls largely masked by a mass of gneiss rubble (Welsby 2003b, 44).

During the excavations from December 2002 until February 2003 the building was investigated and was found to be the remains of a pyramid with offering chapel and enclosure wall (Welsby 2003a, 30). The appearance of the remains was the result of extensive robbing during which the whole of the core of the pyramid had been removed along with the west wall and the central part of the east wall. In February 2003 there was only sufficient time to clear the rubble from the superstructure and to plan the monument. In order to complete the work a small team, assisted by up to eight local workmen, was in the field from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> December based at et-Tereif.<sup>1</sup>

In the course of the work the whole area around and within the monument was excavated down to the natural except beneath the structural elements of the monument itself. Total excavation will have to await the removal of the walls. As expected the whole of the interior of the pyramid was occupied by a large robber pit 1.6m deep. This was half sectioned and it was clear from an examination of the fill that it had refilled naturally over a period of time. Most of the fill consisted of thin lenses of coarse gravel from the core of the pyramid and thin silt lenses with water crusts along with some large blocks of granite which had slipped down into the pit. At the bottom of the pit these fills were found directly on the bedrock and elsewhere directly on the bottom of the descandary leading down to the tomb. It

appears that the robbers totally emptied the tomb and descandary and in the process removed all evidence of the burial and of the grave goods associated with it. Among the fill were found some large pottery sherds which, to judge from the wear on them, had been used as digging tools by the robbers. One was distinctive, a fragment from a post-Meroitic beer jar of a type found the previous winter in a post-Meroitic grave on Ishashi Island.

The tomb and descandary (Plate 1) were cut down from the surface of the natural, a dark brown earth speckled with white flecks, and through the underlying homogenous pale grey earth which overlies the gneiss and basalt bedrock. At the top of the descandary was an oval slot 570 x 165mm in size and 270-395mm deep extending right across it. Beyond that was a large step down followed by another into the roughly circular tomb. The body may have been



*Plate 1. The tomb and descandary. The oval post-hole is visible in the centre of the photograph.*

placed directly onto the bedrock and, owing to the small size of the tomb, was presumably placed in a crouched position. Before the tomb/descandary was filled an oval post-hole, 310 x 200mm at the top tapering to 155 x 85mm and 250mm deep, was dug in the bottom of the descandary at the mid point of the pyramid.

<sup>1</sup> Team members - Mohammed Idriss (cook), Hyder Mohammedin (antiquities officer), Isabella Welsby Sjöström (archaeologist, pottery specialist), Derek Welsby (director).



Plate 2. Pits in the enclosure to the east of the offering chapel, looking south.

Also dating to this phase, a number of pits were dug to the east of the location later to be occupied by the offering chapel (Plate 2). Two of these were on the main axis of the monument and one partly cut the other. They were filled with sand and gravel. A little to the south was another circular pit approximately 500mm in depth with a similar fill; right at the bottom was a collection of 12 udjat eyes, in fine grained ferruginous sandstone, amazonite(?) and perhaps glazed composition, three of the latter being gilded (Colour plate I). Exactly under the south-east corner of the offering chapel was a shallow bowl-shaped pit in which was a thick layer of charcoal and many fire-reddened pieces of gneiss (Plate 3).

These pits, the descandary and the tomb were sealed by a layer of coarse gravel up to 300mm thick, on which the walls of the monument, without any foundations, were built. The pyramid was approximately 5.85m square and survived to a height of a little over a metre, up to four courses. It was constructed throughout of gneiss blocks, those on the face chosen with some care so as to form in many places the sloping face of the pyramid. The core was of similar blocks, the interstices filled with coarse gravel. The truncated pyramidal capstone was of yellow Nubian sandstone, which must have been brought from over 50km distance. The offering chapel was

constructed with walls a single block thick and was entered through a centrally placed doorway to the east with a large threshold stone. The whole was surrounded by a very poorly constructed and laid out enclosure wall standing to less than 1m in height.

A little outside the entrance into the enclosure was an oval pit approximately 900mm deep which, apart from the usual coarse gravel and silt fills, contained a few fragments of bone including a vertebra.<sup>2</sup> Other much shallower pits were found to the south and north of the enclosure wall (Colour plate III). They may have been quarry pits associated with the construction of the monument, although one of the pits contained two large blocks of gneiss, more logically associated with the destruction of the monument than with its construction.

Finds were very sparse and consisted of the 12 udjat eyes, an oval gold bead, parts of a speckled granite discoid mace head found among the rubble, a small carnelian hemispherical object, four metal rings<sup>3</sup> decorated along their outer edge with metal spheres and coated in a yellow powder (Colour plate II) and pottery sherds. All the pottery was of low quality but was typical of the early Kushite period and can be closely paralleled among the material found in the early Kushite cemeteries in the immediate vicinity of the pyramid.

## Bibliography

- Eisa, K. A. 1999. *Le Mobilier et les Coutumes Funéraires Koushites à L'Époque Méroïtique*. Meroitica 16, Wiesbaden.  
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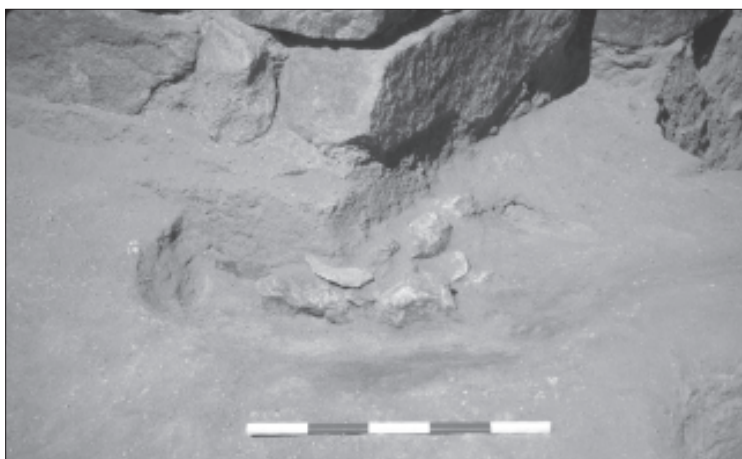


Plate 3. Foundation deposit under the south-east corner of the offering chapel.

<sup>2</sup> This material has been studied by Dr Margaret Judd. She notes that all the human skeletal material may come from the same individual, an adult male of robust build.

<sup>3</sup> For an exact parallel to these rings, from el-Getaina on the White Nile, see Eisa 1999, Fig. 37.



*Colour plate I. Amri to Kirbekan Survey. Site 4-F-71. Gilded udjat eye from a pit within the enclosure wall to the east of the offering chapel of the pyramid.*



*Colour plate II. Amri to Kirbekan Survey. Site 4-F-71. Metal rings coated in a yellow powder.*



*Colour plate III. Amri to Kirbekan Survey. Site 4-F-71. The eastern end of the enclosure with quarry pits outside and pits of uncertain function within.*